

## Today's issue of TD

*Travel Daily* today features five pages of the latest travel industry news.

## Hawaii tax delayed

A **SIGNIFICANT** levy on cruise passengers sailing the waters of Hawaii has been delayed while the US Federal Court mulls an appeal lodged by the Cruise Line International Association (CLIA).

The 11% tax was scheduled to apply from 01 Jan, however CLIA's legal challenge has provided some respite while the courts assess the merits of the appeal.

CLIA has been critical of the mooted tax, previously noting that while it was important to work with local communities on sustainability, it is equally crucial to protect the cruise sector, which generates close to US\$1 billion in total economic impact for the American state.

## EVT buys QT Auckland

EVT has purchased the 150-room QT Auckland for \$76 million as part of its ongoing strategy to grow hotel earnings through targeted ownership of strong assets in key city locations.

"This investment also complements the upcoming conversion of our Queenstown property to the QT brand, which will be an exceptional property in one of our strongest markets, with Auckland serving as a key feeder market for international visitors to Queenstown," EVT CEO Jane Hastings added.

# NT taps heavy hitters

**TWO** high-profile travel executives have been named on the inaugural Tourism and Events NT Advisory Board.

Intrepid Travel's local chief Brett Mitchell (**pictured**) and Regent Seven Seas Cruises Vice President Sales and GM Asia Pacific Lisa Pile have joined five other experienced leaders to help the Top End reach its recently unveiled 2032 travel and tourism targets (**TD** 05 Nov 2025).

The primary goal of the new board will be to provide expert advice on growing the NT's visitor economy by better showcasing its Indigenous culture, unique landscapes and cultural diversity.

Speaking to *Travel Daily* about his new position, Mitchell said it was an honour to take on such an important travel mission.

"The NT has a real opportunity to lead Australia's next chapter of tourism, connecting travellers with nature, culture and country while supporting local communities," he explained.

"I'm looking forward to working with the NT Minister, the board, industry partners and communities to help deliver on the ambitions of the NT Visitor Economy Strategy 2032."

Other advisory board members include former Australian Grand Prix Corporation General Manager of Operations Amy Hill, CEO of the Department of Trade, Business and Asian Relations Hayley Richards, former Chair of Tourism NT Paul Ah Chee,



CEO of Crocosaurus Cove Penny Priest, and former Qantas Chief Marketing Officer Tim Jones.

In Sep last year, NT Minister for Tourism and Major Events, Marie-Clare Boothby, announced a major overhaul of the Top End's approach to attracting visitors, folding in Tourism NT and NT Major Events Company to create the streamlined Tourism and Events NT (**TD** 22 Sep 2025).

Tourism and Events NT CEO Suzana Bishop said the hunt to create the advisory board saw 54 nominations received in total, including 21 from the NT and 33 from interstate and overseas.

"I look forward to seeing this new board shape the future of the Northern Territory visitor economy, from growing the industry, to showcasing our incredible events and experiences to the world," Bishop said.

After a sluggish recovery following the pandemic, the NT saw its visitor volumes steadily climb from 2023, surpassing 2019 volumes last year.

The NT's ambitious 2032 strategy includes the goal of growing tourist spending from \$1.5 billion to \$2.2 billion. *AB*

## Venezuelan impacts

DFAT has reiterated its advisory for Aussie travellers looking to visit Venezuela as 'Do not travel', after the US launched strikes on the country and arrested its President, Nicolas Maduro.

The message to travellers is that the security situation remains "unpredictable" and may worsen over the next few weeks.

"If you're in Venezuela despite our advice, you should consider leaving if safe," DFAT said.

US military actions have caused havoc for flights to the Caribbean as well, impacting multiple cruise lines, while added warnings are also now in place for Colombia.

## Albo's travel reform

**PRIME** Minister Anthony Albanese has proposed banning family members of politicians from flying business class on tax payer-funded flights as part of a sweeping set of drafted reforms of government travel expenses.

In addition to restricting partners of public servants to economy class seating, the suite of proposals will also seek to scrap an allowance affording politicians three annual Australia-wide return trips per year.

If the new caps get the green light from the Remuneration Tribunal early this year, travel would effectively be limited to between Canberra and the MP's electorate or a senator's home state, with some exceptions for senior politicians like the Opposition Leader.

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## End of the line for start-up

**THE** parent company of Rail Online is now in liquidation after falling into administration in Nov last year (**TD** 28 Nov 2025), a development exclusively revealed by **Travel Daily**.

According to a document filed with ASIC by administrators Grant Thornton Australia, creditors of Metro 1 Travel and Technology are owed around \$2.7 million, including \$1.8 million outstanding to unsecured creditors and close to \$880,000 in unpaid wages and debts to employees.

The report also warned Metro 1 Travel and Technology may have been insolvent from Jun, but that



further investigation was needed during the upcoming liquidation phase to verify the claim.

Metro 1 Travel and Technology was unable to achieve revenue growth and did not have the financial means to support its cost base, which was “already relatively lean”, the report noted.

“This resulted in the company accruing significant legacy debts in which it was ultimately unable to repay as and when they fell due,” it added.

Metro 1 Travel and Technology had previously taken steps to secure a \$12 million capital raising late last year to repay debts and resume its growth plans, however attracting the funding was unsuccessful due to “external factors”, Director James Dunne told administrators.

Rail tickets that have already been purchased and issued remain valid for travel. **AB**

## Greece disruptions

**THOUSANDS** of travellers are facing disruption across Europe after Greece was forced to shutdown its airspace due to a radio failure that saw air traffic controllers lose communication with planes.

More than 90 flights were affected in and out of Athens Airport, with services departing Dublin, Barcelona and Paris ordered to return to their airports of origin, while those from Copenhagen and Malta were cancelled altogether.

Other arrivals into Athens were paused, while flights in and out of other Greek airports have also been impacted - including three out of Heraklion on the island of Crete - with most inbound flights cancelled or diverted to Turkiye.

An initial investigation suggested the disruption may have been due to the failure of an antenna in the Gerania Mountains near Athens.

## Clark exits Rosewood

**JODIE** Clark, Director of Global Sales APAC at Rosewood Hotel Group, has announced her departure from the company after almost 10 years.

Clark has held several roles at Rosewood, including being part of the pre-opening teams at Rosewood Phuket and Rosewood Luang Prabang.

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## A Himalayan hideaway



**CENTARA** Hotels & Resorts has announced the opening of its first property in Nepal - the Himalayan Hideaway Resort Pokhara, The Centara Collection, which welcomes its first guests this month.

Set in the city of Kaskikot, the secluded retreat combines modern comforts with authentic Nepalese charm, and offers views of the Fishtail Mountain massif.

The property features 42 rooms, suites, and villas, each designed with wooden accents, private gardens or balconies, and the ability to accommodate couples, families and groups.

Guests can enjoy a wide range of experiences, from yoga and spa rituals at Cense by SPA Cenvaree to guided village walks along the Sarangkot Loop Trail, Annapurna Base Camp trekking, paragliding, and ultralight flights over the mountains.

Facilities include an all-day dining restaurant, bar and lounge, outdoor swimming pool, library, and rooftop terrace, a speciality Pan-Asian restaurant, an intimate tea house, and meeting venues.

“We are thrilled to bring Centara’s signature Thai-inspired hospitality to Nepal for the first time,” said Prapaijit Thongma, General Manager of Himalayan Hideaway Resort Pokhara, The Centara Collection.

“With our secluded setting, breathtaking panoramic mountain views, and the deep cultural significance of the Annapurna region, we are ready to welcome travellers from around the world to experience this extraordinary retreat of discovery, wellbeing, and connection.”

To celebrate the opening, Centara Hotels & Resorts has introduced ‘Spirit of the Himalayas’, a launch offer inviting guests to be among the first to experience the property.

Available from now until 31 Mar 2026 for stays before 30 Apr 2026, travellers can take advantage of a ‘stay three, pay two’ offer, as well as complimentary airport transfers, and special benefits for CentaraThe1 members, including an additional 15% savings and triple points. **JM**

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## Boost your profile

TRAVEL Agent Finder (TAF) is kicking off the new year with an agent incentive with a major marketing prize.

The campaign invites advisors to refresh their TAF profiles in Jan for the chance to win a 12-month pro listing, plus two private 90-minute one-on-one marketing sessions with founder Anna Shannon, focused on visibility, positioning and content strategy.

"These sessions are about helping agents communicate their value clearly, confidently and authentically, without needing to become marketing experts themselves," Shannon said.

Find out more details [HERE](#).

## Delta expands One

DELTA Air Lines' exclusive Delta One Check-In concept has expanded across a number of the carrier's hubs in the US.

These elevated spaces complement the Delta One international business class experience, and is now available as travellers make their way to check-in and go through security.

Dedicated Delta One Check-In areas are now available at Atlanta, Boston, Detroit, Los Angeles, Minneapolis-St. Paul, NY, Salt Lake City, and Seattle.

"Delta One Check-In sets the tone for each one of our Delta One customers to begin experiencing their elevated journey from the moment they arrive at the airport," MD Airport Experience Greg Forbes said.

## Coral Adventurer detained

THE Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) has confirmed it has detained *Coral Adventurer* to determine her safety to sail after running aground on a coral reef in the waters of Papua New Guinea late last month.

The incident saw 80 guests forced to take a smaller vessel to PNG and charter flight to Cairns after initial efforts to release the ship were unsuccessful.

Our sister publication *Cruise Weekly* has since confirmed that passengers who had their sailings cut short aboard *Coral Expeditions' Adventurer* have been offered full refunds.

In a statement posted by the AMSA about the troubled vessel, it noted a "reasonable suspicion" that *Adventurer* was not currently seaworthy due to the potential damage sustained during the recent grounding.

If it turns out the ship has sustained serious damage, it would run counter to initial statements made by Coral Expeditions that she escaped relatively unscathed from the unfortunate incident in late Dec.

The AMSA also stated there is a chance the vessel is "sub-standard as a result of failures in the implementation of its Safety Management System under the International Safety Management Code".

*Adventurer* currently remains anchored in Papua New Guinean waters while it undergoes a thorough safety inspection.



The grounding is another serious blow for Coral Expeditions, with the incident occurring in the vessel's first sailing since the death of an 80-year-old passenger who was inadvertently left behind on Lizard Island during a guided hike, prompting an AMSA investigation into the cruise line's procedures (*TD 29 Oct 2025*).

MEANWHILE, Pearl Expeditions has highlighted that its 50-metre vessel *Paspaley Pearl* employs "cutting-edge WASSP W3P multibeam sonar technology" to navigate safely through poorly or inadequately charted waters across Australia's Kimberley, PNG, and parts of Indonesia.

"We can profile the seabed 100 times faster than traditional echo sounders, identifying reefs, rocks, wrecks, and obstacles before confirming safe passage or approaching our final holding position," Pearl Expeditions General Manager Mick Fogg said.

"This isn't just about navigation efficiency, it's about safe and responsible expedition cruising.

"We can verify safe passage without leaving any trace on pristine reef systems". AB



## Window Seat

A WAX statue of President of the United States Donald Trump (**pictured**) has been pulled from a Texas museum after it took one too many punches - literally.

The San Antonio-based wax museum has removed Trump from public view after the statue was physically attacked by a number of visitors.

A spokesperson for the company that runs the museum said this kind of attack on the Commander-in-Chief is not uncommon, with other statues of Barack Obama and the Bush family having come under attack from rogue fists in past years.

While it is unknown exactly when Trump will be back on public display, the *San Antonio Express-News* reported it is likely to be returned when a similar statue of former President Joe Biden is completed, reuniting the two old foes.



## FUTURE FORWARD

APT Travel Group CEO David Cox on the evolution of the luxury travel sector.

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## Hamilton Island bought

**HAMILTON** Island has been acquired by global asset manager Blackstone after being listed for sale by the Oatley family in Sep 2023 (**TD** 03 Oct 2025).

Following regulatory approvals, the \$1 billion deal will see the US-based company, which owns the majority stake in Crown Resorts, take over the iconic tourism asset.

The Whitsunday resort spans more than 2,800 acres across two islands - around 70% of which is undeveloped - and features five hotels, more than 20 restaurants and bars, 20 retail outlets, an 18-hole golf course, a marina, and its own international runway.

"Hamilton Island is an exceptional destination, and we are honoured to build on the vision and dedication that the Oatley family has brought to investing in its transformation and add a standout asset to our portfolio," said Chris Heady, Chairman of Asia Pacific & Head



of Real Estate Asia, Blackstone.

"We are committed to investing in the long-term success of Hamilton Island, its people, and its local businesses and community," he added.

The Oatley family ran the resort for more than two decades, making significant investments to the island during that time, including the recent transformation of its Sails Restaurant (**TD** 17 Dec 2025). *JM*

## Japan bear attacks

**AUSSIES** planning to hike Japan's mountainous regions are being warned about the growing threat of bear attacks, which have spiked over the past year.

In 2025, Japan recorded 235 bear attacks, 13 of which have been fatal.

The Asian black bear is responsible for most attacks, and the main areas in which they have occurred is the Akita prefecture and the island of Hokkaido.



## Lufthansa marks a ton



**GERMAN** airline Lufthansa will celebrate 100 years of operations tomorrow, in that time growing to become the second-largest airline group by passenger numbers in Europe, only behind Ryanair.

Subsidiaries include SWISS, Austrian Airlines and ITA Airways.

In 1997, Lufthansa joined Star Alliance, which has allowed for codesharing with key airlines worldwide including Singapore Airlines, Air Canada, Air China and Air India.

To commemorate the anniversary, Lufthansa will bring out special 100-year liveries on several of its aircraft (**pictured**).

A 100-year emblem will also appear on all of Lufthansa's boarding passes this year.

The airline was founded from a merger between Junkers Luftverkehr and Deutsche Aero Lloyd, with the first aircraft taking flight 06 Apr 1926.

The company re-established

itself in 1953, laying out the foundation of the company in the modern day, adopting the name Deutsche Lufthansa AG. *JB*

## Independents grow

**AN INCREASING** number of new travel advisors are starting out as independent contractors, attendees at Envoyage's 2025 conference have heard.

Several speakers at the congress in South Africa expressed how shifts in both travel trends and technology have allowed independents to gain an edge over traditional agencies.

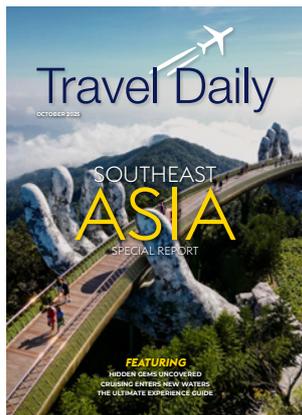
These agents were said to be in a greater position to deliver, without requiring any upstream approvals from agency owners.

Independents now have access to tools that were exclusively in the hands of major travel agencies and improving bookings, the congress suggested.

## JB to be a smash hit

**JOURNEY** Beyond will take tennis fans from the 'Centre Court to the Red Centre' as a major sponsor of this month's Australian Open.

Tennis fans will be asked "Are You Ready to Journey Beyond" as part of the significant campaign, which will involve a series of television commercials, sponsor billboards, and integrations within the broadcast, raising awareness for its brands.



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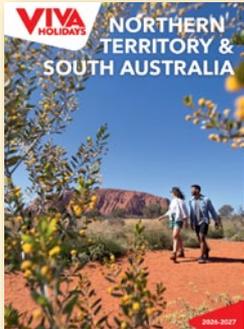
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### Silversea - Expeditions

Silversea has unveiled its latest expeditions brochure, highlighting voyages across Antarctica, Asia, French Polynesia, the Galapagos Islands and many more. The cruise line offers a detailed description of its stand-out itineraries in all seven continents, as well as its expedition experiences, ships, personalised service, and onboard dining and enrichment. For instance, readers can turn to page 36 to learn what is on offer in Antarctica, from kayaking past glaciers in Paradise Bay to rambling along the coasts of Half Moon Island

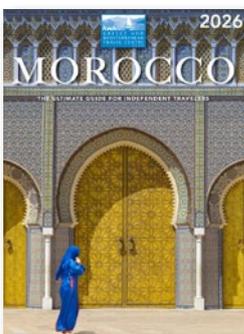
while spotting penguins. Visit page 42 for the latest details on the line's new hotel, which opens in Chile this year. Access the brochure [HERE](#).



### Viva Holidays - NT & SA 2026/27

Viva Holidays has released its 84-page 2026/27 Northern Territory and South Australia brochure in which agents and their clients will find a new range of extended touring options across Uluru, Alice Springs and Darwin. East Arnhem Land, one of Australia's last true wilderness areas, has been added to the program with accommodation in beachside locations. In South Australia, travellers can choose from a selection of new hotels and experiences

in the Barossa, Adelaide Hills, Murray River and the Outback. [CLICK HERE](#) to view the full brochure online.



### Greece Med Travel - Morocco 2026

Greece & Mediterranean Travel Centre has launched its brand-new 2026 Morocco brochure, showcasing a collection of immersive journeys that highlight the diversity of one of North Africa's most captivating destinations. Readers will discover flexible itineraries featuring iconic spots such as Marrakech, Fes, Casablanca, the Sahara Desert, and the Atlas Mountains. Highlights include 4x4 dune excursions, camel rides and luxury camps in the heart of the Sahara,

as well as explorations of the beaches of Agadir and visits with Berber communities in the High Atlas Mountains. See the brochure [HERE](#).

## Carrier swings in new direction



**MALAYSIA** Aviation Group's (MAG) government-subsidised MASwings regional airline has transitioned to its new ownership under the new AirBorneo brand.

A sale was agreed to between MAG and the Sarawak Government almost 12 months ago, with the state-owned AirBorneo having now taken on flight operations, customer service, and the management of all passenger-related matters.

AirBorneo was established following the acquisition of MASwings, and commenced its first services two days ago.

Existing MASwings branding may continue to be visible as AirBorneo progressively establishes its corporate identity.

MASwings was established in 2007 as East Malaysia's first commuter airline, created to address the air travel needs of Sabah, Sarawak, and the Labuan.

The airline has operated more than 430,000 flights and carried more than 19 million passengers across its network.

The fleet consists solely of

turboprop aircraft, including the DHC-6-400 and ATR 72-500.

AirBorneo is evaluating potentially expanding its operations, including more routes and larger aircraft. *MS*

## Aussie among injured

**CRANS-MONTANA** is being questioned about the presence of sparklers, as well as its safety compliance, after 40 people were killed and 119 injured at the ski resort's Le Constellation bar.

The venue burst into flames about 1.30am local time on New Year's Day, with one Australian believed to be among the injured.

A multi-agency investigation is now examining whether revellers were crushed trying to flee the burning building, after speculation it was inadvertently set alight by sparklers.

Other questions being asked include whether the emergency exit was blocked, foam cladding on the ceiling was legally installed, and if too many people were inside the venue.